

The University of Chicago

AMERICAN RESEARCH ON JESUS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1940

BY
HEBER C. SNELL

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AMERICAN RESEARCH ON JESUS

By Heber C. Snell

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About a generation ago, American scholars began to do significant work in the related fields of gospel criticism and the life and teaching of Jesus. It is the purpose of this paper to present in summary fashion the background and the results of their labors. Among those who worked in these areas of study during most of the first three decades of the present century I have chosen for presentation six men who were representative of the best contemporary scholarship and whose work appears to have a permanent value. In the order in which they are presented here these scholars are: George H. Gilbert, Shailer Mathews, Benjamin W. Bacon, Ernest D. Burton, Henry B. Sharman, and Shirley J. Case.

During these years many important social changes occurred. The great War itself almost ushered in a new world, a world disillusioned of many of its former ideas and institutions. One dislikes to think of scholarship being thus affected, and yet it may be said that with respect to the scientific study of Jesus and his teaching as great a disillusionment as these years record came upon us. The confidence expressed as the nineteenth century closed changed to almost complete skepticism. At that time there was enthusiasm for the idea that the historical Jesus could be known and his teaching set forth; today, no one acquainted with the studies in gospel criticism — unless indeed he be hopelessly reactionary — believes that it is possible to write a life of Jesus, and much of this same skepticism extends to the presentation of his teachings also.

To understand whence we have come in the study of Jesus and where our American scholars joined the goodly company of his investigators it is necessary to begin two centuries ago. Religion was then rudely awakened from its sleep of centuries by the forces of deism in England and the German Enlightenment, which attacked along the whole line of supernaturalism. As a result intelligent religious leadership divided into two groups,

those who insisted on natural, rational religion alone and a more orthodox group that supplemented reason with revelation. Under the influence of deism Johann S. Semler was the first to distinguish between religion and its formulation in time and place, and by this distinction to put Christianity within history. This was a great insight.

When in the latter half of the eighteenth century certain orthodox Christian rationalists began to write lives of Jesus they did not profit by Semler's idea, and present the Jesus of history (as they supposed they were doing) but instead a creation of their own rationalistic theology. Outstanding among these men was J. G. Herder, who wrote two lives of Jesus, one based on the Synoptic gospels and the other on John. Herder believed that the gospels were not pure history but epics modeling their hero largely on Old Testament prophecy. Ahead of his time in most of his theological thinking he remained a supernaturalist, else he might properly be regarded as the direct predecessor of D. F. Strauss. K. F. Bahrdt and K. H. Venturini, contemporaries of Herder but thoroughgoing rationalists, tried also to present Jesus as an historical person. In their efforts to find an "inner connection of cause and effect" in his life they employed imagination too freely. They regarded Jesus as an Essene and believed his teaching to be at bottom ethical. Karl A. Hase was the first great scholar to attempt a historical treatment on the basis of the gospels. For him Jesus was a developing character, both human and divine, who accepted Jewish ideas, including at first the Messianic program, but later abandoned them. After his death the disciples made him the Messiah. With Hase's *Leben Jesu*, 1829, begins the division of Jesus' life into two periods.

The supernatural rationalism of Hase and his contemporaries continued to hold sway in the study of Jesus, largely as an end result of the struggle between rationalism proper and the forces of the Romantic movement which opposed it, until D. F. Strauss wrote his famous *Leben Jesu* in 1835. Strauss took a new line, reducing everything before the baptism and much afterward to myth. He did not thereby reduce Jesus to a myth as his enemies charged, but he did deal a fatal blow to religious

rationalism. No first-rate scholar, according to Schweitzer, ever again produced a life of Jesus from this standpoint.

Strauss' *Life of Jesus* was epoch-making. The gospel tradition, in his hands, seemed about to disappear as containing historical elements. In this respect the Fourth Gospel went entirely by the board. Herder appears to have been the only scholar before Strauss who recognized the Greek character of this gospel and its incongruity with the Synoptics. One of the most important facts about Jesus, thought Strauss, was his developing consciousness as Messiah and apocalyptic Son of Man. This supernaturalistic eschatology conditioned all his teaching. But it was Strauss' mythical hypothesis — which found an effective way to dispose of irrational elements in the gospels without denying the earthly Jesus — that began mainly to influence the development of theology.

Meantime gospel criticism, which had received an added stimulus from the controversy between Strauss and his critics, had been making real headway. C. H. Weisse and C. G. Wilke, as early as 1838, had set up the Marcan hypothesis, and this was elaborately confirmed by H. J. Holtzmann in 1863. The Fourth Gospel had become increasingly less valued as history, and by 1847 F. C. Baur had shown it to be completely irreconcilable with the Synoptic gospels and very doubtful as the work of the Son of Zebedee. Baur's greater conception, of Christianity as a movement within history and of the gospels as its products, made it clear that their correct analysis was vital to the understanding of this movement in its early stages. It was a great step in advance, but in effect a discrediting of some of the ideas of Strauss and Baur, when H. J. Holtzmann gave the two-document theory a final formulation and when, in writing about Jesus, he left the Fourth Gospel on one side.

Holtzmann became now the standard not only for gospel criticism but for the interpretation of Jesus. He never wrote a life of Jesus but in his great work, *Die synoptischen Evangelien*, he made an interpretation of him which became the model for four decades for almost all who wrote lives of Jesus. Even Strauss was influenced by it. A. Schweitzer is certain that here interpretation got off the track of the historical Jesus and never

found it again until Johannes Weiss. Jesus was modeled by these scholars, Schweitzer thinks, not on the basis of the sources nor in view of his environment but on the German liberalizing theology. Luigi Salvatorelli has much the same criticism.

In H. H. Wendt's great work, *Die Lehre Jesu*, and in Adolph Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums* may be seen clearly the features of the "liberal Jesus" of the last decade of the nineteenth century. It is important to recall these features, both because of the prominence of the liberal conception in the history of the study of Jesus and because of its striking contrast to the eschatological view which challenged it. Fundamental in Holtzmann, Wendt, Harnack, and the rest, was the idea of the Kingdom of God as moral and spiritual, "an ideal relationship of fellowship between God and man," a present reality with Jesus and his disciples, destined to grow and fill the earth. The conception came directly from Jesus' sense of sonship to a loving heavenly Father. Jesus was God's mediator — a moral and spiritual Messiah — in establishing the Kingdom. Men must live righteously and accept him as such in order to enter it. The teaching was eschatological only on the surface.

Johannes Weiss, in a small volume, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, 1892, sharply challenged the liberal view. The Kingdom of God was not a developing moral and spiritual thing in the world, it was in no sense present but wholly future. Within a generation it was suddenly to be revealed, with Jesus in the dramatic role of Messianic Son of Man. On earth Jesus had been a prophet, differing from John only in knowing from his baptism on that he was designated the Messiah to come. Since the Kingdom was transcendental no earthly ethic applied to it; to understand Jesus' teaching in regard to it one had to divest himself of modern conceptions. Weiss had predecessors back to Strauss, but none had brought together the elements of the eschatological view into a consistent whole.

Such, in a word, was the course the study of the gospels and the life of Jesus ran in Germany from the latter part of the eighteenth century to the twentieth. The details of the story would show how intensively the whole field was worked. The

high tribute paid by A. Schweitzer, W. Sanday, and others to German scholarship is well deserved.

But although, throughout the period before 1900, the lead was in Germany in the study of the life of Jesus, the historical character of the gospels was first seriously questioned in England. Under the influence of deism both their miracles and their divine inspiration were challenged. There had been sporadic attempts to analyze the gospels early in the nineteenth century, but the picture one gets of the English scene on the whole is very different from that of the German. The conservatism of English scholars and the English church, amounting often to determined opposition to higher criticism of the Bible, combined to retard Biblical research in all its phases, so that only the boldest spirits dared come into the open with the new views. Germany and all her theological works continued during most of the century to be anathema.

From about 1850, however, so many powerful stimuli were affecting the English mind that the situation was much improved. Among these forces were the decline of Evangelicalism, the trial of Bishop Colenso, the application of evolution to the sciences of man, the translation into English of German theological works, and the appearance of such dynamic publications as *Essays and Reviews*, *Ecce Homo*, and *Supernatural Religion*. In addition, the excellent work of English scholars in textual criticism and in the making of grammars, lexicons, and commentaries had had its effect, so that scholars began to go from these comparatively safe areas to the critical study of the gospels and Jesus and to make contributions — such as the *Horae Synopticae* of Sir John Hawkins — quite the equal of anything on the continent. In the specialized area of the teaching-of-Jesus study the translation (1892) into English of Wendt's *Die Lehre Jesu* accelerated interest. Its interpretation of the teaching was at once taken as a model for books in this field.

Although the influence of the Enlightenment was not unknown in America in the eighteenth century there was little to stir religious thinking here until the rise of the theological seminaries in the first part of the succeeding century. A few scholars

the first being Moses Stuart of Andover, began to study and to be affected by the newer views in Germany, and with the coming of Philip Schaff in 1844 this influence became increasingly greater. American scholars did especially good work in textual criticism, as the product of the American Committee of Bible Revision later attests. Some critical work was done on the gospels toward the close of the century by E. P. Gould, Orello Cone, and others, but this at best lagged considerably behind the German researches. The few lives of Jesus written in America depended mainly on the Fourth Gospel for the general plan of his career and employed freely the method of harmonization wherever problems were recognized. A few scholars achieved some independence in their thinking but most of them, like their English cousins, were dominated by either their theological presuppositions or their fears.

One point stands out plainly: Germany lighted the path for the critical study of Jesus and his message. Strauss showed that neither the way of rationalism nor the way of supernaturalism could discover Jesus, and he forced scholars to find a better method and basis for interpreting him. Weiss and Holtzmann found such a basis in the two-document theory of gospel origins. The liberal lives of Jesus, since they tried to build on some defensible and critical analysis of the sources, led on toward a more historic conception of early Christianity. Schweitzer's appraisal of them is low, as would be expected, but he admits that they at least showed the way "that could not be taken to find the historical Jesus." Schweitzer credits them also with clearing up the relation between John and the Synoptics and a compelled recognition of the eschatological Jesus of Mark and Matthew. J. Weiss' *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* had of course opened up anew the eschatological problem.

For twentieth century investigation of the subject there was available the Weiss-Holtzmann source theory, thought by many to be the final solution of the Synoptic problem, and whatever of value came from the early stages of the liberal and eschatological controversy. Under the conditions some were sure, others skeptical, that a historical life of Jesus could be written. It is significant that in the early years of the new century, only one European, Oskar Holtzmann, wrote a comprehensive treat-

ment of the subject based on the two-document theory. There was more assurance that Jesus' teaching could be known, and Wendt's great work became a model in America, as it did in England, for writers on the teaching.

The partial displacement of systematic theology by the "new science of Biblical theology" enabled scholars to treat the message of Jesus by itself rather than as an integral part of the whole range of New Testament teaching, which the older view regarded as a self-consistent whole. Under the aegis of the newer view of scholars in America wrote books on theology in which a large section was given over to the teaching of Jesus. Notable among such men were George B. Stevens, D. F. Estes, and Ezra P. Gould. Others, such as H. L. Willett, G. Alexander, and E. I. Bösworth, wrote books dealing with Jesus and his teaching. All these men were aware of much of the critical work done on the gospels but they wrote their books with scant attention to its significance and under the domination of their theological presuppositions. They deserve credit, however, for a sincere effort to deal with their subject historically, as they understood this term.

Belonging to the group of Biblical theologians but more aware of the limitations of their science was another scholar, George H. Gilbert, who sought a more valid historical approach. Stimulated strongly by Wendt he produced (1896) *The Student's Life of Jesus*, which analyzed the sources in the German manner, and three years later *The Revelation of Jesus*. Gilbert's source theory, upholding the mutual independence and historical reliability of the gospels, was out of date. His interpretation of Jesus' message fell in with Wendt's for the most part, with some idiosyncracies, and called forth the praise of B. W. Bacon and others. A decade later Gilbert accepted the prevailing theories as to gospel sources and wrote (1912) a life of Jesus. It was notable for its very exceptional fidelity in holding the interpretation to its source theory, but the interpretation itself was little in advance of earlier views.

Gilbert perceived rather clearly the influence of Greek thought on the gospels, and an insistence fundamental for him was that the teaching of Jesus is to be interpreted in the light of his life;

both revealed the character of God. This unique revelation, summed up as the Fatherhood of God and a high evaluation of men but hid for centuries by interpreters and the church, may become known through modern knowledge and be as spiritually effective as in the earliest times. This was the author's main conclusion. Gilbert showed rare courage in publishing as his last book (1930) *The Christian Content of the Bible*, intended to exhibit the essential content of scripture for the Christian. There can be no doubt that in G. H. Gilbert we have a gospel critic and interpreter of keen perception and a historian who knew that he possessed a mandate to be true to his source materials.

Shailer Mathews came to the study of the New Testament from a background of training in sociology and history rather than in literary criticism. When the social gospel movement began he became one of its most ardent and consistent advocates, making up his first book, *The Social Teaching of Jesus*, (1897) from essays previously written from this point of view. Mathews here presented the Kingdom of God as an ideal social order beginning with Jesus and progressively realized until the last stages, at which time it would be completed by catastrophe. The book went through several editions, eventually (1928) being replaced by *Jesus on Social Institutions*. In the thirty years intervening Mathews had come to see that Jesus had no social program and that he was not a social but a religious reformer. Both books made love central in the teaching of Jesus; he tried to win men to a life of brotherliness in view of the new world order soon to be ushered in. In the later book Mathews modified his views on Jesus' social teaching to a point where this could better fit the eschatology which he had come to believe characterized Jesus' message in a formal but real way.

This small volume (the 1928 book) reflects the fundamental position of its great predecessor, one of the most substantial books produced by an American scholar, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*. The leading purpose here was to portray Jewish Messianism and to determine the relationship of Jesus and early Christianity to it. Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God is to be understood mainly in the light of contemporary Messianism. While there is some basis in the sources

for regarding the Kingdom as "present, social, and evolving" there is much more which makes it future and apocalyptic. Jesus conceived of himself as the Jewish Messiah and Son of Man in the Danielic sense, but he transcended in several ways the Messianic conception because of his originality as a thinker. On earth he was a prophet teacher, in the New Age he would be Judge and King. But these eschatological features, for Mathews, turn out to be form rather than substance. They are essentially a recognition of immortality and eternal life, and though Jesus thought of himself as the Christ it was not as the spectacular but as the moral and spiritual revelation and agent of God. Every age has its thought forms in which to clothe the truth it sees; in this light the eschatology of Jesus is to be understood.

It is important to note Mathews' critical approach, for therein lies perhaps his greatest contribution to the study of Jesus. He accepts the two-document theory but recognizes that the sayings source might be multiple. In the sources the test of genuineness of a saying is its disagreement with "apostolic belief," the saying to be credited to Jesus in the degree that differs from this category. But the characteristic thing about Mathews' method is not the type of source analysis he employs but his "social-psychological" technique. Religious ideas have back of them in all ages *people*, consequently the way to understand the ideas is to understand people. By knowing Jewish Messianists and other Jews one may get the most light on the part Messianism played in early Christianity. This is essentially a historical approach and continued to be emphasized in Mathews' later books. It enabled him to find in loyalty to Jesus, as one who held certain attitudes toward men and God, rather than in "certain teachings" of his, the true essence of Christianity.

Since European students of the gospels continued in the twentieth century to emphasize literary analysis as the chief basis for the study of Jesus and his message it is not surprising that Americans generally should follow suit. Three such Americans, whose work I shall now briefly review, are Benjamin W. Bacon, Ernest D. Burton, and Henry B. Sharman. They were all influenced, however, by other ways of approaching the study of Jesus, notably Burton.

Particularly fortunate in both his physical and cultural heritage, B. W. Bacon was early impressed with the need to bring the higher criticism to his contemporaries, that the Bible writers might be liberated from dogmatism and speak unrestrained their own messages. Patiently preparing himself for this high task during a long pastorate, he was able in 1900 to publish his first book, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, which summed up the current gospel criticism without guaranteeing it at all points. A dozen years later found his critical views practically unchanged: there were still two main streams of tradition from which most of the historical materials in the gospels were derived, one was Peter's story *via* Rome and the other Matthew's sayings by way of Jerusalem.

An early interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount gave Bacon his first opportunity to apply his critical views to the gospels. It was possible, he thought, to find here Jesus' own words, but overlaid by the evangelists. By 1902 Bacon had presented in various essays his position with reference to Jesus' message. Jesus agreed with John in calling for repentance and warning of future judgment. If he thought of himself as Judge or Messiah or Son of Man — which is unlikely — the terms were all in harmony with his real message, which was essentially ethico-religious. The Kingdom was within, a filial relation to the heavenly Father in terms of Jeremiah's "new covenant", to be progressively but surely realized because it was God's will.

In *Jesus and Paul* (1921) Bacon sought to solve the relationship of the teaching of Jesus to the "gospel of reconciliation" of Paul. The second Source, embodying the primitive Logia of Matthew, presented Jesus as a prophet, the "son" and servant of God. All this is in the background of Paul's theology but Paul, following the disciples after Jesus' death, enveloped, as it were, this gospel of Jesus in the word of the Cross, the doctrine of God reconciling the world to himself through Christ. This new Way of the disciples was a gospel of grace symbolized by the Supper and the Baptism. All the gospels beginning with Mark were influenced by "Paulinism", particularly the Fourth Gospel, where the earthly Jesus has completely become Paul's spiritual Christ. *The Story of Jesus*, six years after *Jesus and*

Paul, is Bacon's life of Jesus more than half of which is given to literary source analysis. It deepened rather than changed in any material way the author's characteristic source theory and interpretation. The liberal view of Jesus is still held, including now the clear admission that Jesus did assume the Messianic mission and title, but only in the higher, i. e., the moral and spiritual sense. In *The Story of Jesus* Bacon's last emphatic word is that Jesus left with his disciples the memorials of Baptism and the Last Supper, and that they are a sort of guarantee of the authenticity of the Church's faith.

Bacon has been called the dean of American New Testament critics. His great monographs on the gospels procured for him an international reputation, particularly his critical work on the Fourth Gospel, which has been known and prized for a generation. Bacon was unusual for the consistency with which he held his interpretation true to his sources and for the acuteness with which he defended both. He was a stout contender against the eschatological interpretation. Though he came to appreciate the *formgeschichtliche* studies in the gospels he was most influenced, in his thought of Jesus and his message, by the literary and historical criticism of the gospels to which he had devoted so many industrious years.

Ernest D. Burton is another example of a man devoted to a great conviction, the worth of Christianity and the necessity of literary and historical criticism of the gospels as a means of discovering its original data. Coming to the work of gospel criticism with a long period of diligent preparation, he had formulated by 1904 a theory of Synoptic relationships the clearing up of which he perceived to be basic to any interpretation of Jesus. His solution gave three major sources used in common by the writers of Matthew and Luke and one for Matthew alone. Each of these gospels had in addition several minor sources not possessed by the other. This "multiple-source theory", as it is commonly called, has been adjudged by a number of competent scholars to be a much more satisfactory account of gospel relationships than the two-document theory but it has never received either the attention it deserves or general recognition. Burton also formulated a unique theory of sources of the Fourth Gospel but this has received comparatively little notice.

Although Burton considered interpretation the very center of the New Testament student's task he applied the process very little throughout his lifetime. About the end of the century he had written that the main characteristic of Jesus' thinking was its appeal to reality rather than tradition and that Jesus' personal religion centered in his feeling of sonship toward God as a Father. These ideas are a clue to his later interpretation which, aside from some materials for beginning students, was almost wholly embodied in an unfinished treatise written between 1915 and 1922, entitled *The Teaching of Jesus* (There is a typescript in the University of Chicago library). Burton's plan in this work was to give an exposition of the great teachings of Jesus, including the point of view of the Fourth Gospel, but unfortunately some of the teachings about which there is controversy are not in the manuscript. Burton thought that Jesus followed the prophets in his idea of God but with greater emphasis on his fatherliness. The Holy Spirit had not figured heavily with Jesus; when he used the expression at all it denoted God in touch with the human soul. The Kingdom of God was basically "a social order in which both God and men have a place, and in which men live in conformity with God's will, trusting and loving him as their heavenly Father — and in accordance with his will, loving and serving one another". This "community" was present in the person of Jesus and his followers and would sometime be fully, but only gradually, realized.

More important than his interpretative work on Jesus were the writings of Burton which were intended to give a complete critical approach to the subject. I have already noted his work prior to 1905. Two later books, *The Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels* and *A Source Book for the Teaching of Jesus*, are of great value as are also certain essays particularly so his contributions to G. B. Smith's *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916). The first book presented for comparative study the literary sources; the second was a suggestive application of the method of comparative religion in order to distinguish Jesus' ideas from those of his contemporaries. The way to utilize materials in the historical study of Jesus, thought Burton, was to work backward

from the Fourth Gospel to Jesus himself, later testing the result by moving in the reverse direction. Because of an exceptionally busy life and frequent poor health Burton was never able to make this study; his contribution lies rather in the field of method and it is premature even now to evaluate its extent. Possibly no man more consecrated to a task and more painstaking, honest, and courageous in trying to see it through has ever written on New Testament themes.

An early disciple of Burton and a leading defender of his literary source theory was Henry Burton Sharman of whom little is known until he appeared in Chicago as an aspirant for the Ph. D. degree in the New Testament field. In 1906 he presented to the Divinity School of the University of Chicago as his dissertation an elaborate study entitled *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*. It had been worked out independently and without much attention to any source theory; but when the writer became acquainted with Burton's solution of the Synoptic problem it so fitted his own interpretation that he made it, with but slight modification, the critical basis of his own book. Sharman gave a hundred pages to an exposition of the various documents and to examples of their agreement and disagreement with one another and the gospels. An important conclusion coming from his study was that many of the disagreements may be observed, accounted for, and corrected. This was one technique by which to arrive at sound interpretation.

By such close comparative study Sharman finds the Kingdom of God presented as a present reality, Jesus' true teaching about it being almost wholly contained in the parables of Mark 4: 1-34. There it is seen to be "an interposed force with potent permeative energy, which must work slowly but surely in the structure of society". Because this conception was so different from the current one among the Jews Jesus had to keep it for awhile a secret. Even the disciples misunderstood and confused Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem with his forecast of the rapid growth of the Kingdom, furnishing this out with all the appropriate apocalyptic features and making Jesus central in its future coming.

Several other books produced by Sharman from 1917 on are student guides of one sort or another. Notable is his *Records*

of the *Life of Jesus*. Because of its useful display of the gospel materials and other valuable features it is a 'harmony', in the best sense, and more. From the other books, whose content is predominantly questions, one may glean that Sharman believed in the historical method, that Jesus differed fundamentally from the Jewish teachers and was not interested in titles, that Sharman believed the Kingdom of God to be evolutionary, not catastrophic in character, and that men were required — and still are — to give uncompromising devotion to the will of God. Sharman perceived in this no teaching of a spectacular kind, it was all from a mind eminently sane.

Sharman holds today (1939) substantially the same views as he has held for a generation, including the conviction that Burton's source theory is as good as has been offered. His estimate of Jesus, after what he regards as a searching criticism, is very high. If these are limitations, still it must be said that his production of such books as *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future* and *Records of the Life of Jesus* guarantees him a secure place among great American students of the gospels and of Jesus.

In Shirley Jackson Case we have an example of an American scholar well acquainted with and appreciative of the literary source theories of the gospels, but unwilling to leave the matter of the reconstruction of the life and teaching of Jesus with them as the chief basis. Case had early welcomed the higher criticism and the contributions to the study of religion of the *religions-geschichtliche* school. Under the latter's influence he had written, in the first decade of the century, on the effect of the environment on growing Christianity. This, with other factors such as the "Jesus or Christ" controversy, brought him to the questions of the historicity of Jesus and how much the gospel reports of him were a creation of the early Christian communities; and it seemed to Case that history, as the study of the environment and behavior of those who became disciples of Jesus in the first century, could most contribute to the answer. His studies have continued to emphasize this, the so-called "social-historical" method, as the vital point of departure for the study of Christianity.

By 1910 Case had presented his view of the religion of Jesus and he insisted that this must be distinguished from the theology with which the disciples after Jesus' death invested him. The central principle of Jesus' religion was "his abiding consciousness of fellowship with the Father". Men were to achieve this and live righteously, in the spirit of service and love toward others. Following the lead of the greatest prophets Jesus had gone beyond the exclusiveness of the Jews, urging all men to become sons of God in the present rather than to seek his favor on a day of judgment. If he even claimed to be the Messiah it was as the minister of this truth. By his god-like life Jesus had so powerfully impressed his disciples that, after their resurrection visions, some of his group elaborately officialized him.

The Social Origins of Christianity, in 1923, is the classic setting forth of the "social-historical" method as applied to the story of early Christianity. Its major task was to present a "new reading of the history in the light of contemporary social experience". This made central the study of the environment and behavior of persons and groups in beginning Christianity, these persons and groups being in fact the creators of Christianity. Life — not doctrine — gives the key to understanding. Narrowing the application of this method to Jesus, Case published in 1927 his *Jesus: A New Biography*, ostensibly an unbiased, scientific effort to recover the historical Jesus. To recover him requires (1) that one know the Jewish and gentile life of the first Christian century, (2) that he go back of the literary sources to the first elements of tradition, and (3) that, having found these, he ascertain if possible the type of social experience reflected in them. If this is gentile it reflects the milieu of the gospel writers, but if it is Jewish it may reasonably be concluded that one is face to face with an original element of the tradition or even with Jesus himself.

Jesus: A New Biography does not so much advance to new positions as develop those already assumed by the author. Jesus is shown to be the disciple of John and herald of the coming Kingdom, not as a Messianist but as an eschatologist. His task was the preparation of his fellow Jews for the new righteousness of the Kingdom. His teaching, which may be known "with a fair degree of certainty," probably came from a Galilean group

which rightly esteemed him as a prophet and so faithful disciples preserved the teaching; another group built a Christology about him, and this unfortunately came to control the tradition. Certainly, whatever valuation of Jesus may come of it, Case's book is noteworthy as the application of what may be the most fruitful method yet conceived for the historical study of Jesus. This in itself should make the writer's reputation secure.

With the foregoing summary of the course of events, within the limits set, in the study of Jesus and his message, this article might conceivably come to a conclusion, but it is my purpose to look again at the whole story for the more significant features. I do not imply by this statement any intention finally to evaluate these, or the actors in the story, but merely to take account of the changes which have occurred and to note their possible meaning for future research in the study of Jesus.

The deism and rationalism of the eighteenth century, through their criticism of the old supernaturalism, compelled renewed attention to the Christian tradition and its sources. The literary analysis of the gospels went on vigorously and reached momentous conclusions, eventually making Mark the chief source of Matthew and Luke and setting the Fourth Gospel largely aside as a historical source for the life of Jesus. With Strauss and his mythical hypothesis came a new stage in interpretation, ending the period of rationalistic and supernaturalistic lives of Jesus and stimulating anew gospel criticism. The Weisse-Holtzmann two-document theory gave a firmer basis for history; and a historical method, especially following F. C. Baur, was gradually developed and increasingly employed. The liberal lives of Jesus, taking their cue largely from H. J. Holtzmann's *Die synoptischen Evangelien*, utilized this approach with a sincere purpose to recover the historical Jesus.

In the last half of the century many new factors came in to affect the study of the gospels and Jesus, prominent among them being Ritschlianism, the social gospel movement, the intensive study of Judaism, and the re-emphasis of Johannes Weiss of the eschatological issue. Of crucial importance for the general situation was the doctrine of evolution in its effect on religion and the sciences of man, for when the idea of development was

once applied to human institutions, the shape of things began to be clear and order seemed to rise from chaos in the study of Christian origins. Such a complex situation had in it elements both of control and of liberation of the spirit.

The new century inherited all this legacy, with considerable assurance that it knew what to do with it. Students of the life and teaching of Jesus were generally confident that their reconstruction could now take place, because as they supposed, source criticism had put Jesus and his message within certain reach. But most of the books written were controlled by Ritschlian tendencies and other modernizations to suit the particular interest of the writers and the public to which they were addressed. Thus Jesus and his teachings became all things to all men. One must note that in this state of affairs eschatology was a counter influence and, more sanely, social-history and *Formgeschichte*. These all sought to identify Jesus as a man of his time, within a specific environment.

This complex milieu was nowhere more potent for good or ill than in America. Because most of the books on Jesus and his message were mere products of their time they have not endured. Yet because the greater students of the subject felt the impulsion of the liberating movements of their age and endeavored to free themselves from those which restrained their thought, their work has qualities of permanence. Such were the men of whom this survey takes chief account. They reacted positively to the *religionsgeschichtliche* method, higher criticism, and the idea of development in history, and thus put themselves in a position to learn what the gospels and the world in which Jesus moved had to teach them. Their teaching and their writings form consequently a luminous page in the otherwise dull theology of the contemporary scene.

For this reason it is instructive to recall how these American scholars stood with reference to gospel criticism and other leading problems connected with the study of Jesus and his message. Only one of them, G. H. Gilbert, hesitated for awhile to accept the prevailing gospel criticism. All of them, including Gilbert later, became conscious of its inadequacy and learned that other sources than Mark and "Q" (in whatever way this was con-

ceived) formed a part of the tradition. All but B. W. Bacon were favorable to a degree to E. D. Burton's multiple source theory, H. B. Sharman — after Burton himself — being its most valiant champion. Two of the number at least, Shailer Mathews and S. J. Case, thought that it was more important to understand the social and psychological factors than the literary, and utilized these helps more than source analysis in their approach. Without exception these scholars stressed the importance of the ethical and moral teaching, and Jesus' application of it to his generation and without specifying time limitations; but two of them, Gilbert and Mathews, felt compelled to believe that Jesus conceived of himself as in some sense an apocalyptic Messiah. None believed that he regarded the Kingdom as wholly future or thought it was to come in crass apocalyptic fashion. Burton, Sharman, Bacon, and Case struggled against thinking of Jesus as being interested in titles at all, while Gilbert and Mathews, though persuaded that he accepted them, made them little more than accommodation to the current Messianism. There was unanimous agreement in giving large place to Jesus' personal religious living and its influence on his contemporaries. Case alone definitely classifies Jesus as a prophet: the others speak of him indefinitely as "something more", or as the "anointed of God" in some high moral and spiritual sense. All these scholars wrote lives of Jesus, Burton and Mathews collaborating, and Sharman limiting his effort in this direction to lesson outlines and an arrangement of part of the Synoptic gospels.

If this brief summary shows a high degree of agreement in interpreting Jesus, a good share of it would be traceable no doubt to the common heritage of theological liberalism. Certainly it was not due to any similarities in their critical approach, not even in the case of Burton and Sharman, who agreed almost completely on source analysis; besides it is a notorious fact that few scholars, having set up a theory of the sources, adhere to it with any particular fidelity and this is especially true in the case of a literary-source theory. Even Shailer Mathews and S. J. Case, whose historical methods enabled them to break most with the liberal tradition, could hardly be rated as being outside of its principal boundaries.

Here is food for thought. It has been averred by the psychologists that one's 'apperceptive mass' largely controls one's reaction to present stimuli, the result being that the patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior tend strongly to remain what they have been. History abundantly confirms psychology in this matter. No more than Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom of ancient memory, or Luther and Calvin of the Middle Ages, or Harnack and Sanday and Goguel of the modern, could our American scholars escape completely from theological and philosophical presuppositions. Not until interpreters of Jesus find a way to surmount the heritage which has largely produced them, will subjectivity and modernization in their works be greatly lessened; and even if they could succeed in this, the age and state of the gospel materials would always preclude a completely scientific reconstruction.

American scholarship of the third decade of the present century did not accept to any extent the method of *Formgeschichte*, and this may be a limitation. All the men, whose work has been surveyed in this article, had opportunity to become acquainted with it, five of them surviving its introduction for more than a decade. Those within the radius of influence of the "Chicago School" would probably be more impressed with the value of the social-historical method, since this embraces everything the German method has except emphasis on the form of the gospel materials and the supposed indications of this for a time order. But it is more likely that most of them — clearly Bacon and Sharman, whose forte was literary criticism — saw little need to penetrate the hinterland of the gospel literary sources to find and analyze the units of the tradition.

One may claim without extravagance that, as literary and historical critics, our American scholars of the past generation were the equals of any. B. W. Bacon's great monographs on the Gospels of John and Mark are internationally known and highly valued. There are those who think that E. D. Burton deserves similar recognition for his multiple-source hypothesis, as satisfying more than any other the requirements on the level of literary materials. An increasing number of scholars also believe that the social-historical method, as developed and

emphasized by S. J. Case, has greater capacity than any other for evaluating the tradition in all its stages of development from 'pericopes' to finished gospels, and for clearing up and ordering the story of the Christian movement which produced these materials. Other American scholars should share, to some extent, with Case the honors for the development of the "social-historical" method. G. H. Gilbert had some very clear insights in this direction, and Shailer Mathews early stressed the importance of the study of religious persons in their environment and proposed historical tests to distinguish the teaching of Jesus from later modifications.

And so, giving due weight to all obstacles to a purely historical view, it is hardly to be doubted that we are nearer to a historical reconstruction of the teachings of Jesus — and consequently nearer him — than men have ever been since the first century. Interpretation is still tossed about somewhere between "consistent eschatology" and Barthianism on the one side, and Humanism on the other. The teaching of Jesus has been reduced in amount by form-criticism and social-history but it has not disappeared. Dibelius and Case can still present a very substantial content as "*die Botschaft Jesu*" or the "religion of Jesus". Older interpreters, among whom American scholars are representative, can present more, of course, and pretty well agree in regarding it as the product of a sane mentality. If positive and definite advance has not been made in this area one may at least feel that some blind roads have been marked — and that is something.

Whatever may be the contribution of scholarship to the study of Jesus and his teaching during the first three decades of our century, it is safe to say that the great American scholars here dealt with have had no inconsequential part in it. The story of their labors indicates that they have distinguished themselves more in the field of method than in interpretation as such, yet even here I see no reason for rating them as inferior to others. They did their work in the spirit of true scientists, and historical science — though still imperfect in method — offers the only way to apprehend the earthly Jesus and his teaching. For almost two centuries he has been persistently sought. It has seemed to the writer that "one increasing purpose" runs through

and unifies the whole story, the purpose on the part of devoted scholars to become more and more historical.

One does not like to think of a magnificent experiment — such as is this quest of the historical Jesus with its long and devious paths of trial and error — as utterly failing, but if that is to be its fate, and men are to give it up at last, the fault will not lie with the historical method *per se*. It will lie rather with *our* failure to make of it an adequate instrument of discovery, or with the historical materials available, or with the human ingenuity necessary to bring the perfected instrument to bear upon them. In all the labor bestowed on this heroic search for the real Jesus, possibly history's most fascinating and baffling problem, our American scholars have borne a highly creditable part.

